



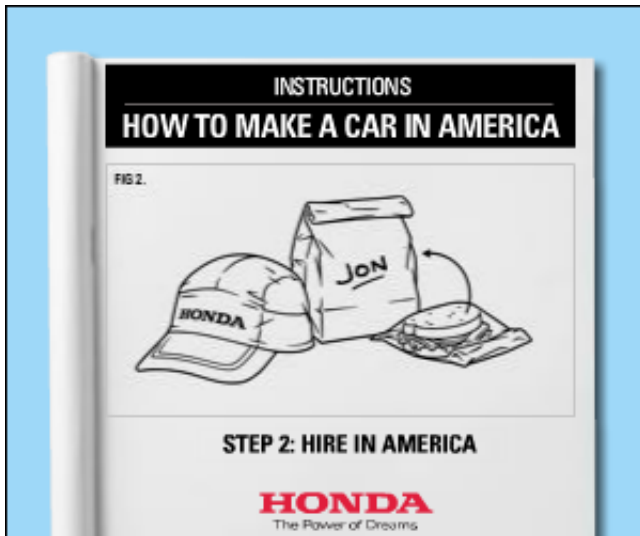
Senate Dems challenge Obama on chained CPI for Social Security

By Sam Baker - 03/12/13 04:05 PM ET

Liberal Democrats challenged President Obama on Tuesday over his willingness to cut Social Security benefits.

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) said he and Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), among others, challenged Obama on the so-called “chained CPI” — a change in the way Social Security benefits are calculated.

Obama has said he is open to chained CPI as part of a “grand bargain” that would include spending cuts as well as new revenue. And he didn’t back down from that support during a closed-door meeting with Senate Democrats, despite pushback from Harkin and Sanders.



Harkin said the message from Obama was “basically, things are open for negotiation” in pursuit of a grand bargain.

“The president sort of talked about being willing to make some changes here so we can improve some other things over here” when Sanders raised the issue, Harkin told reporters.

In previous efforts to negotiate a grand bargain with House Republicans, Obama had supported raising the Medicare eligibility age. The White House has since said that Obama would not support that proposal. Harkin said Obama didn’t explicitly rule out raising the Medicare age, but implied that the policy has fallen out of favor.

“I didn’t hear a commitment, but I spoke about that,” Harkin said. “He didn’t make a commitment, but he seemed to indicate that yes, there are other ways of solving the entitlement problem without doing that.”

Obama met with Senate Democrats the same day House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) released his 2014 budget proposal, which calls for partially privatizing the Medicare program.

Harkin said Obama and Senate Democrats discussed steps the Affordable Care Act is taking to reduce Medicare spending, namely through improving the coordination of healthcare services.

Healthcare came up during the lunch meeting “I think in a good way —that with the implementation of the Affordable Care Act we’re already seeing some reductions in cost,” Harkin said.

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